GirlSMART National Program

Annual Evaluation Report 2011-12

Prepared by Nada Djordjevich, EdM Gia Rauenhorst, MA Meg Hudson, EdM Rachael Berger, MPP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GirlSMART is an early elementary literacy intervention program that assists girls from underserved communities and diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The program uses research based practices to support girls in developing effective reading skills and promotes social-emotional development through a character education program. This annual report analyzes qualitative and quantitative data from the 2011-12 year. Gibson & Associates (G&A), a California based firm with over twenty five years of experience in educational and community-based evaluations, conducted this evaluation.

GirlSMART is an afterschool program located in states across the country, serving high-need populations. Initially developed in California at Girls Inc. locations in Alameda County, the program has rapidly expanded. The program is now established in five additional states (Florida, Nebraska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and New York) with approximately 500 girls enrolled in the program during the school year. The majority of GirlSMART participants are at statistically high risk of academic failure. Most are from low-income households, attend high poverty schools, and 70% are Hispanic-Latino, African-American, Native-American, or mixed-races. According to the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 80% of low-income students are not reading proficiently in fourth grade. Additionally, ethnic minorities who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade are twice as likely as white students to not graduate from high school (*Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011 KidsCount*).

To complete this report, G&A analyzed student demographic information, assessment data, and classroom teacher, parent, and staff surveys. G&A staff also conducted classroom observations for all programs, except New York, which began in January. The 2011-12 program results are promising in several areas.

Addressing Student Literacy Needs

- The program targets populations of students at risk for not achieving literacy standards.
- Program staff uses research-based approaches to teach literacy and social-emotional skills.
- The majority of GirlSMART participants in kindergarten and grade one exceeded target objectives in literacy and are at low risk of needing reading interventions in future years.
- Nearly fifty percent of students met the ambitious literacy goals set by the program.
- Nearly all parents and guardians surveyed indicate satisfaction with the program, and attributed their daughters' academic improvements to GirlSMART.
- Classroom school day teachers surveyed indicate that the majority of GirlSMART participants exhibit positive attitude toward reading and cooperative behaviors.

Developing an Effective and Sustainable Program Model

- The program expanded and developed systems for national affiliate conversations, including a website, national conference calls, and an intranet for internal communications.
- GirlSMART leaders indicated enthusiasm for the program and for this year's training modules.

The annual report is divided into four sections: Program Overview and Evaluation Methods, Improving Literacy, Using Best Practices, and Improving Self Concept. Aggregate results are provided for the entire program and data from each affiliate. More detailed analysis of each affiliate's program and progress are available in individual reports. Within applicable sections, example survey comments are provided that reflect frequent responses. A full listing of all comments and data is provided in the appendix.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND EVALUATION METHODS

Program Overview

The GirlSMART curricula design includes a balanced literacy approach and a positive social-emotional development. The literacy program incorporates three complementary research-based practices (*Read Alouds, Readers Theater*, and *Words Their Way*) designed to assist students in developing fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and oral and auditory skills. The program's approach to social-emotional development is through the use of the qualities of *Strong, Smart, Bold* (SSB), a thematic management approach woven into the literature and activities. A typical GirlSMART schedule will include an hour a day of literacy instruction five days a week, designed to be highly engaging and include a combination of whole class, centers, and independent work.

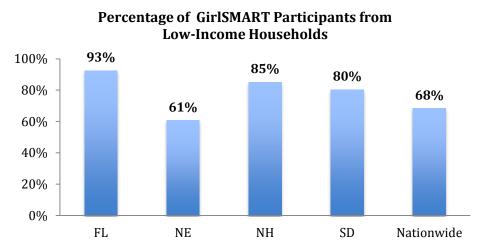
Demographics

The majority of GirlSMART participants are in kindergarten through second grade, with the largest number of students (131) in the first grade. Nebraska currently has the largest number of participants (112), followed by New York, with 103 students enrolled. The number and grade level served varies by state, as shown in the chart below.

Grade Level Enrollment By State						
Location	PK	K	1	2	3	Total
FL		37	38	32		107
NE	1	20	20	32	39	112
NH		7	27	18	7	59
NY	29	27	30	17		103
SD	48	25	16	10	8	107
Nationwide	78	116	131	109	54	488

Low-income

The vast majority of students in GirlSMART are from families traditionally at risk for not achieving future academic success. According to provided data, 68% of GirlSMART students receive free or reduced lunch, double the national average. New Hampshire, Florida, and South Dakota have the highest percentages of girls coming from low-income households, with eighty percent or more of their populations eligible to receive free or reduced lunch.



"Twenty-two percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6 percent of those who have never been poor. This rises to 32 percent for students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty."

Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011 KidsCount

The percent of participants from low-income families was not available from New York. Since 100% of the students in the New York program attend high-poverty schools, with 84% or more students from families eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, one can assume most New York GirlSMART students are low income.

Most GirlSMART children attend schools with higher concentrations of poverty than the state average. Most school sites also have reading scores lower than their states' averages, as shown in the following chart.

Public Schools Attended by	FL	NE	NH	NY	SD
GirlSMART participants	(2 schools)	(2 schools)	(10 schools)	(3 schools)	(6 schools)
Percent of schools with more low-	100%	100%	90%	100%	66%
income families than state average					
Percent of schools with below the state	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%
average Reading scores					

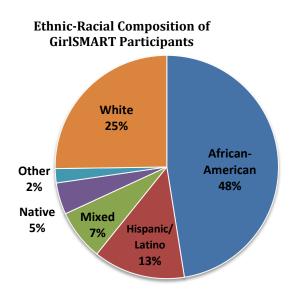
One-Parent Households

Half of GirlSMART participants are in one-parent households. Florida, New York, and Nebraska have the highest percent of single-parent households with New Hampshire (30%) the lowest.

Percentage of GirlSMART participants from One-Parent Households



Since often single-parent households are also low-income, it can be difficult to single out risk factors associated with this family structure. A recent study indicated that children in one-parent families are less likely to be read to daily, less likely to be told stories, and less likely to visit a library monthly (*Family Matters: Family Structure and Child Outcomes, Alabama Policy Institute, 2005*). Through Read Alouds, Readers Theater, and Words Their Way, GirlSMART provides girls with exposure to books, stories, and print text, increasing opportunities for them to engage in activities often associated with good readers.



Ethnic-Racial Demographics

About half of the program participants are African-American (48%), 13% are Hispanic-Latino, 7% Mixed, and 5% Native-American. There are demographic variations between sites. Most participants in Florida, Nebraska, and New York are African-American, and, the majority white in South Dakota and New Hampshire.

The program predominantly serves ethnic-racial minorities statistically at risk of academic failure. According to 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress data, 44% of fourth grade White students read at proficient levels with the numbers falling to approximately 17% of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native American students achieving proficiency.

Evaluation Methods

Gibson & Associates worked collaboratively with the GirlSMART national team and local affiliates to develop program goals and collect and analyze data. In May 2011, the evaluators met with GirlSMART program staff to review previous reports and identify program objectives and goals for 2011-12. The goals identified were:

Improving Literacy Skills: The primary goal of the program is to develop or maintain the girls' reading ability with the majority achieving grade level proficiency.

To address this goal, the evaluators examined whether the program met the following two objectives:

Objective 1: To maintain grade level reading status or achieve significant improvement.

Objective 2: Instructors use best practices for teaching.

Improving Self Concept: A secondary but highly important function of the program is to develop or maintain a positive attitude toward learning and self-esteem.

Objective 1: Classroom teachers and parents will indicate improvement or maintenance of a positive learning attitude.

Objective 2: Classroom teachers and parents will indicate improvements or maintenance of a positive self-concept.

The evaluators used a formative approach, providing a fall site report and mid-year data to inform continuous improvement. This evaluation used the following tools for measurement:

- Student literacy assessment data from fall, winter, and spring
- Staff surveys collected three times a year
- Parent and guardian surveys collected in Spring 2012
- Participant daily classroom teacher surveys
- Classroom observations conducted in Fall 2011

There are several items about data collection methods and procedures that should be noted. First, the evaluator maintains a high degree of confidentiality and does not receive information with individual student names. All assessments and survey responses are coded to maintain youth privacy. Second, there are not uniform data collection procedures among all affiliates. Some programs are conducted at school sites and GirlSMART staff has strong relationships with



classroom teachers and site administrators. In other locations, there may be several feeder schools, and GirlSMART staff may not be well known by the classroom teachers. In some states, the local school day classroom teacher administers the DIBELS assessments, and the GirlSMART program staff receives assessment data from them. At other sites, GirlSMART staff conduct their own DIBELS assessments.

It is important to note that the sites were not able to collect matched data for all students due to differing data collection systems. There is matched data for approximately fifty percent of all youth in the program. Within the data sections, G&A has noted matched scores when available, as well as end-of-year (Spring 2012) assessment data. In 2012-13, there are plans to evaluate growth based on dosage (hours attending program) and to more systematically use DIBELS assessment systems across sites.

IMPROVING LITERACY

All affiliates use national assessment tools to examine student progress in literacy. Data is presented from DIBELS 6th Edition benchmark assessment tools. DIBELS divides data among three categories (Deficit, Emerging, and Established). The DIBELS assessment instruments provide criterion-referenced target scores that represent reading progress. Instruments vary by grade level and include phonological awareness, reading comprehension, accuracy and fluency with connected text, and the alphabetic principle (Kindergarten).

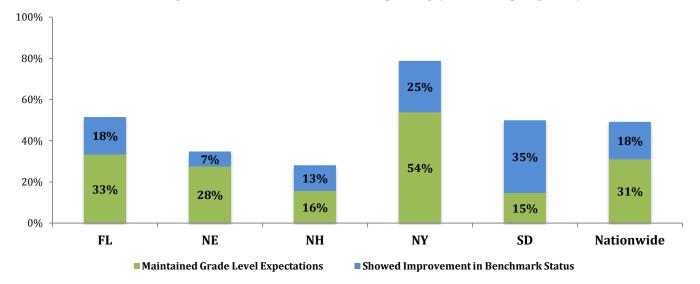
Analysis of National Outcome Data: Matched Scores

Nationwide, about half of all GirlSMART students met the criteria for Objective 1: maintaining grade level literacy status or making an improvement by moving from a lower to a higher status. Students were given subtests that match areas of literacy addressed by the GirlSMART curriculum: phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, and reading comprehension. Thirty-one percent maintained benchmark expectations and 18% showed improvements, for a total of 49% meeting Objective 1. Scores were highest for kindergarten and first grade. In New

GirlSMART Students At Grade Level or Showing Improvement			
Nationwide	49%		
FL	51%		
NE	35%		
NH	29%		
NY	79%		
SD	50%		

York, Florida, and South Dakota, at least half of students met the objective.

Percentage of Students at Benchmark or Improving (Winter to Spring 2012)



Maintaining Grade Level Expectations

As indicated in the graph above, there was a range of progress. In New York, the majority of students entered at grade level and maintained that status (54%). In Florida, 33% of students entered at grade level and maintained status between the two DIBELS administrations. In Nebraska, around one in four students maintained grade level status. New Hampshire and South Dakota had fewer than one in five entering and maintaining grade level status.

Showing Improvements

South Dakota had significant improvements, with over one-third of students not yet at grade level making a gain, followed by New York that had one-fourth making improvements. Florida and New Hampshire had about 15% of students making gains. Fewer Nebraska students made improvements (7%).

Interpreting Results – Other Factors

It should be noted that some students might have learning disabilities that may impact their performance and may be beyond the capacity of this program to provide intervention support. Often non-severe disabilities are not diagnosed until third grade, and approximately 8% of K-12 students nationally, and a higher percent among low-income populations, have a non-severe learning disability (Report Commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Education, 2012). These disabilities may impair language processing skills, in addition, approximately 13% of GirlSMART students are English Learners.

Non-Matched and Matched Scores

While almost 500 students participated in GirlSMART throughout the year, Spring 2012 data was collected for about 300 K-3 students due to attrition and absences. Matched scores were available for 242 K-3 students.

Students Assessed in Spring 2012 (K-3)						
State	FL	NE	NH	NY	SD	Total
Matched Score	55	69	32	52	34	242
All Scores	61	78	58	69	46	312

Literacy Results by Grade Level

The following section provides Spring 2012 results for all students, not matched by past performance.

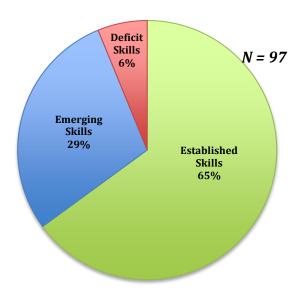
Assessment Results - Kindergarten

Of the 97 kindergarteners tested in Spring 2012, the majority ended kindergarten with *established skills*, showing good to strong skills in phonemic awareness.

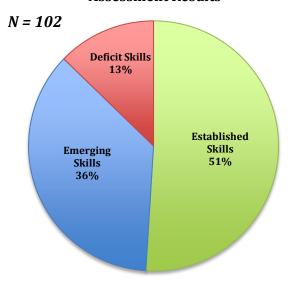
Twenty-nine percent of GirlSMART students ended the program with *emerging skills*. This suggests that they are at risk of missing future benchmark goals without improving skills in phonemic awareness such as matching letters to beginning or end sounds in a word.

A minority (6%) has strong *deficits in key skills* and are at great risk for missing future benchmark goals without improving phonemic awareness.

Kindergarten Spring 2012 Assessment Results



First Grade Spring 2012 Assessment Results



Assessment Results - First Grade

Of the 102 students tested in Spring 2012, the majority ended first grade with emergent to established literacy skills.

Just over half (51%) of GirlSMART students ended their first grade year with *established skills*,

Thirty-six percent of students ended the program with *emerging skills*. This suggests that they are at some risk of missing future benchmark goals.

Thirteen percent of first graders in GirlSMART are at the *deficit level* and will need intervention to catch up.

Assessment Results - Second Grade

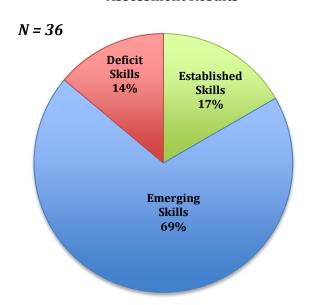
Of the 77 second graders tested in Spring 2012, the majority ended second grade with emergent to established literacy skills.

Twenty-three percent of GirlSMART students ended their second grade year with *established skills*, showing strong reading skills.

Over half (52%) of GirlSMART students ended second grade with *emerging skills*. This suggests that they are at some risk of missing future benchmark goals.

One-fourth of second graders in GirlSMART are at the *deficit level* and will need intensive intervention to help these students catch up in all skill areas.

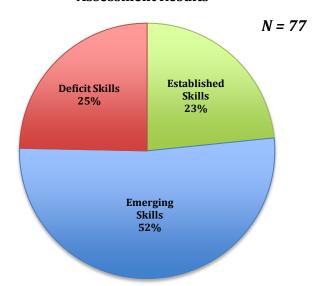
Third Grade Spring 2012 Assessment Results



Assessment Results – Pre-Kindergarten

State	Showed Improvement	# Students Assessed Twice		
NY	93%	16		
SD	74%	34		
Total	80%	50		

Second Grade Spring 2012 Assessment Results



Assessment Results - Third Grade

Of the 36 third graders assessed in Spring 2012, the majority has either established or emerging skills.

Seventeen percent ended the school year with *established skills.*

More than two-thirds (69%) have *emerging skills*, showing some deficit areas, and need for additional intervention to support to meet grade level reading expectations.

Fourteen percent of third graders are at the *deficit skill* level and will continue to need intensive intervention to build comprehension and fluency skills.

The majority of pre-kindergarten students were in the Rapid City and Brooklyn programs. Of the 50 pre-kindergarten students who were assessed twice during the year, 80% showed growth. Since DIBELS 6th Ed. does not have specific benchmark measures for pre-kindergarten students, there is no established level, so only improvements can be noted. The Initial Sound Fluency subtest was selected to assess growth in phonemic awareness, an early pre-literacy skill.

Literacy Results by State

Assessment Results - Florida

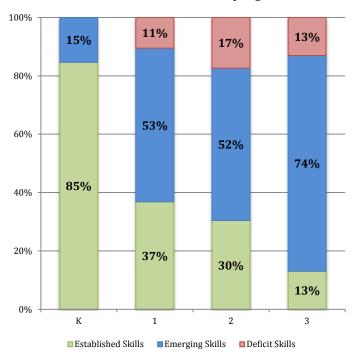
GirlSMART of Jacksonville, Florida served over 100 kindergarten through second grade girls at two school sites. The girls attend very low-income schools with below state-average reading scores in third grade. Very few GirlSMART students ended the 2012 year at a *deficit level*.

Kindergarteners ended the year with 50% of all students meeting grade level expectations and first graders with 63% at grade level. At second grade, the vast majority had *emerging skills*, but no student was at the *deficit* level requiring intensive intervention to catch up.

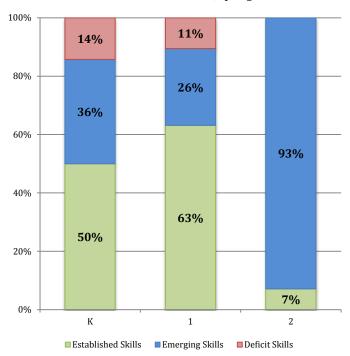
Of students who were assessed in both periods, nearly half (51%) either maintained grade level expectations or showed improvement on benchmarks.

Assessment Results - Nebraska





Florida Assessment Results, Spring 2012



GirlSMART of Nebraska served more than 100 kindergarten through third grade students at two Girls Inc. centers.

The kindergarten class ended the year with 85% of students with *established skills*. The first and second grade students had approximately one in three students end the year with *established skills*, and in third grade 13% of students had *established skills*.

There were matched scores for approximately sixty percent of all Nebraska students. Of those students, 35% of all students met the criteria for Objective 1 by improving results or maintaining grade level status or above.

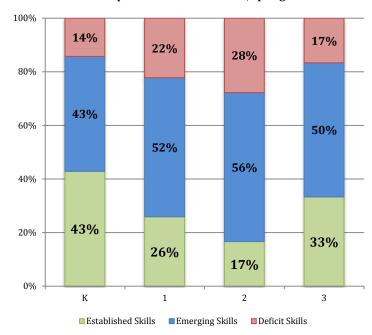
Assessment Results - New Hampshire

GirlSMART New Hampshire served approximately sixty girls at four after-school program centers that received students from approximately ten schools. The program serves kindergarteners through third graders.

In Spring 2012, GirlSMART New Hampshire had the strongest results in kindergarten (43% at *established levels*) and third grade (33% at established level). In first and second grade, fewer than 30% had *established skills*. Overall, about one in four New Hampshire students were at risk with **deficit skills** in reading.

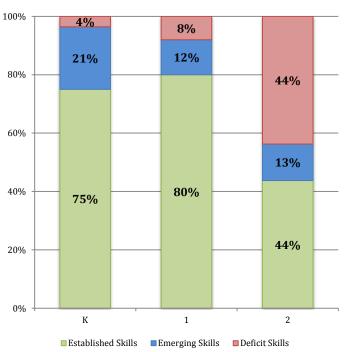
Due to attrition and absences, fewer than 60% of New Hampshire students had matched scores, making it difficult to identify patterns of progress.





Assessment Results - New York

Brooklyn Assessment Results, Spring 2012



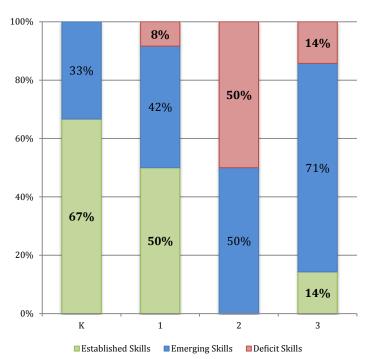
GirlSMART Brooklyn began in early 2012. The program served more than 100 girls from two school sites and was located in an after-school program center.

As indicated in the chart, a high number of kindergarten and first graders ended the program with *established skills*, and less than 10% were at the *deficit skill* level. Scores for second grade were weaker, with equal percentages (44%) at the *established skill* and *deficit skill* levels.

About four out of five Brooklyn students (79%) either increased their score or maintained grade level status.

Assessment Results - South Dakota

South Dakota Assessment Results, Spring 2012



GirlSMART Rapid City served over 100 prekindergarten through third grade girls from six school sites at a youth and family services center. Three of the school sites had exceedingly high poverty levels and very low reading scores.

Performance was strongest in kindergarten and first grade, with nearly all students having *established* or *emerging skills*. At second grade, half of the students left with *emerging skills*, and the other half had *deficit skills*. The majority of third graders were at the *emerging* skills level.

Of all the students enrolled in the program during 2011-12, matched scores were available for less than half. Therefore, it is difficult to assess patterns of progress throughout the entire year.

USING BEST PRACTICES TO TEACH LITERACY

Based on survey data and observations, GirlSMART met Objective 2, defined as using best practices to teach literacy, The GirlSMART program is based on research on effective practices in literacy and social-emotional development. The curriculum incorporates each of the five crucial building blocks of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. During the week, instructors design lessons to build literacy. Professional development is conducted annually each summer and at each site. This year, cross-affiliate conference calls were introduced to promote collaboration among sites.

Professional Development

To ensure that all GirlSMART participants received the highest level of literacy instruction, the program offered professional development opportunities for all staff throughout the year.

Summer Institute: August 8-11, 2011

In the summer of 2011, staff from all regions participated in a four-day training in the Bay Area. The Summer Institute focused on providing implementation strategies in both balanced literacy and social-emotional development. Topics included designing lesson structures, conducting teacher-led Read Alouds, methods to implement Readers Theater, teaching Words Their Way (WTW), and integrating Strong, Smart, Bold.

Observations, Fall 2011

In Fall 2011, G&A conducted observations at each GirlSMART affiliate. There were varied strengths and degrees of curricular implementation. Specific professional development needs emerged: creating opportunities for sharing lesson designs, simplifying procedures, implementing Words Their Way and integrating areas of Strong, Smart, Bold. Based on observation data, evaluators suggested implementation of national conference calls to provide cross-affiliate collaboration.

All-Staff Conference Calls

Three all-staff conference calls provided professional development. The first was designed to share fall observations, and the second included opportunities for integrating Strong, Smart, Bold as a management strategy. The third provided additional support for implementation of the curriculum. Survey data indicated that 100% of participants found the conference calls useful ("I found the Feb 29 conference very informative. It is always helpful to have the opportunity to share common concerns and the various ways we try to work them out.") There were also suggestions to use a "webinar" strategy because of the difficulty in hearing participants and meeting different schedules and to allow sites to revisit the professional development at their leisure.

"It's been great starting a new literacy program. The girls have loved it, teachers have commented on the changes they can see in the girls during the school day, and I have learned a lot and felt like a big part of these girls' lives!" ~GirlSMART Instructor

Program Implementation

Seventeen staff from all locations completed an end-of-year survey. When asked to reflect on the most rewarding aspects of the program, 56% selected "supporting literacy," 31% indicated "fostering self-esteem," and 13% selected "serving as a role model." Open-ended comments described particular aspects of the literacy curriculum (Read Alouds, Words Their Way), social-emotional components ("The relationships the girls form with one another in the program spills over into their school day and they feel they belong to a group"), and the specifics of their center's approach. One staff indicated the greatest success to be "the collaboration between the parents, teachers, school staff and students. GirlSMART allows for the whole village to work together for each child."

"I think Readers Theater is incredibly valuable. My girls know that every Thursday is RT day, and they wait anxiously for it all week long. RT has helped all my girls read more fluently and has definitely built their confidence."

~ GirlSMART Instructor

IMPROVING SELF CONCEPT

The GirlSMART program is designed to support girls in developing literacy skills, a love of reading, a positive attitude toward learning, and in learning to work well with others. These skills and attitudes have been found to be important in supporting students' academic success: "To succeed in school, young children need to have certain predictable social competencies and skills" (National Center for Children in Poverty). The qualities of Strong, Smart, Bold are an integral part of the GirlSMART Program. The evaluation tools that were used to measure this goal were the classroom teacher and parent surveys conducted in Spring 2012. Parents and classroom teachers indicated that GirlSMART met the goal of improving girls' self-concept related to having positive attitudes toward learning. Below are summaries of the quantitative and qualitative results.

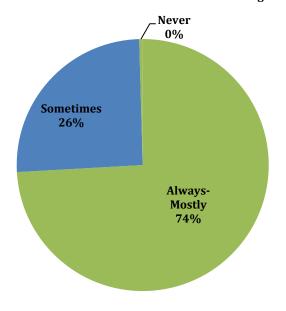
Classroom Teacher Surveys

School day classroom teachers completed surveys for GirlSMART participants during May 2012. Teachers were asked to rate each girl's skills and observable behavior in four areas related to literacy and social-emotional skills. Surveys were returned for 225 students from four states, representing the majority of students assessed in the program as of May 2012.

Attitude toward Reading

A positive attitude toward reading has been found to be an essential skill as fourth graders who reported "reading for fun almost every day" scored higher on average in reading assessments than those who did so less frequently, and students who reported never or hardly ever reading for fun scored lowest."¹

Exhibits a Positive Attitude Toward Reading



Classroom teachers rated the majority of girls as "always-mostly" showing a positive attitude toward reading. All students were rated as at least "sometimes" exhibiting a positive attitude. This data is significant since it suggests that even those students who are at the *deficit* skill level in reading have maintained some to a high level of enthusiasm for this activity.

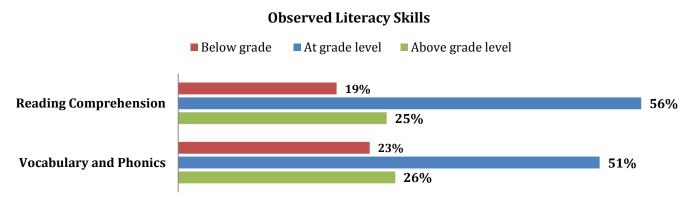
Pre-kindergarteners (77%), kindergartners (70%), first graders (86%), and second graders (74%) exhibited similarly positive attitudes, with first-graders having the highest portion of "mostly-always" exhibiting this behavior. Data was returned for only 17 third graders, and their classroom teachers indicated that 59% mostly to always exhibited a positive attitude toward reading.

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¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress

Literacy Skills

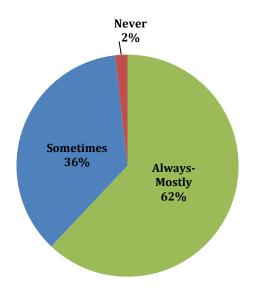
Teachers were asked to rate the GirlSMART participants in their classrooms in Vocabulary and Phonics as well as Reading Comprehension skills. When the two categories were combined, the majority of girls were rated as either at or above grade level in overall vocabulary and phonics skills and in overall reading comprehension skills. The data suggests about one-fourth of students at risk of falling behind others at their schools. Kindergarteners were rated the highest with 88% at or above grade level, 60% of first graders were rated at or above grade level in vocabulary or phonics and 55% in reading comprehension. Of second graders, 76% were at or above grade level in vocabulary or phonics and 78% in reading. Data on reading measures was only returned for seven third-graders.



It is worth noting that this data differs from the DIBELS literacy assessment that provides specific information about more isolated literacy skills. On DIBELS assessments, most GirlSMART participants were not yet at established skill areas. The difference in data may be that the classroom teacher has access to more information about student performance on a daily basis. The classroom teacher may also be evaluating students in relation to their classroom peers. As discussed earlier, reading performance at all but five schools attended by GirlSMART students is below the state average and therefore "grade level" at these sites may differ from national standards.

Cooperative Behavior





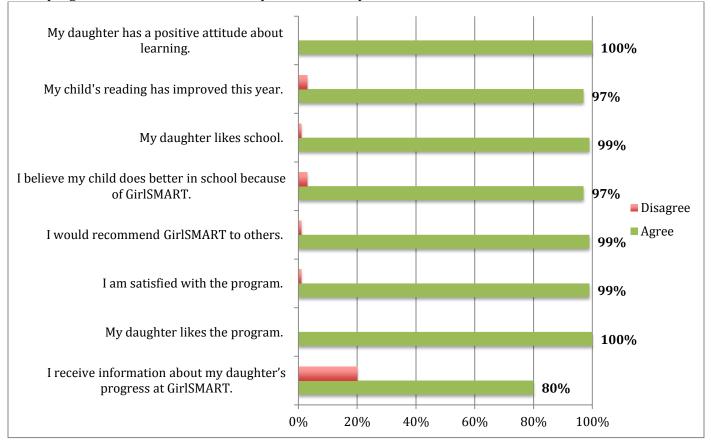
According to survey results, nearly all GirlSMART participants were shown to exhibit cooperative behavior in their classrooms at least some of the time. Almost two-thirds "always-mostly" and 36% sometimes worked well with others. Only 2% were reported to never exhibit this vital skill.

There were only slight variations by grade level. For example, 55% of kindergartners, 66% of first graders, and 69% of pre-k and second graders, and 59% of third-graders "always-mostly" worked well with others.

Parent Surveys

In May 2012, parents and guardians of GirlSMART participants were given a survey about their satisfaction with the program and how the program may have impacted the literacy skills of their daughters. Over 200 GirlSMART parents and guardians completed the survey.

Parents were nearly unanimous in their satisfaction with the program. Nearly all parents also indicated that their daughters liked the program, were satisfied with the program, and would recommend it to others. Ninety-seven percent also believed their daughters did better in school because of the program. From 97% to100% indicated that their daughters' reading improved, that they liked school, and that their child had a positive attitude toward learning. Fewer (80%) indicated that they received information about their daughter's progress in the program. This is an area where improvements may be needed.



Parents' comments about the program were overwhelmingly positive. Samples are provided: "I appreciate this program. It brings children out of their shell, and it allows them to know that the sky's the limit." (Florida)

[&]quot;I appreciate all the extra work that goes into equipping my daughter with a brighter future." (Nebraska)

[&]quot;My daughter really likes the GirlSMART program, and I feel she does better in school because of it." (New Hampshire)

[&]quot;I can see she does better in school due to the extra help she gets at this program." (New York)

[&]quot;Her reading and love of books continue to grow with each year of this program. I feel fortunate to have her continue in such a great program that gives her a wonderful head start to literacy." (South Dakota)